

# Emotional Competence and Emotion Socialization in Preschoolers: The Viewpoint of Preschool Teachers

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## Abstract

The aim of this research is to thoroughly investigate preschool teachers' opinions about emotional competence and emotion socialization. The study group was comprised of 20 preschool teachers working in preschools in the city-center of Aksaray. A semi-structured interview form prepared by the researcher was used as the data collection tool. Data was analyzed using descriptive analysis methods. As a result, teachers explained emotion socialization as a teacher helping children feel comfortable expressing themselves within the framework of sharing and cooperation of the children's own emotional competencies. Teachers often expressed supporting and developing the classroom environment for emotional competence as a secure environment that is warm and comfortable for self-expression. As for the emotion socialization methods used in the classroom environment, teachers mainly expressed supporting children, encouraging children, and talking. Teachers explained that they mostly express their emotions verbally. Within the scope of the teachers' emotional competence, they mostly said being a model and being an empathetic teacher. Teachers expressed that as far as being a role model in emotional competence and emotion socialization, their role is more important than parents'. They stated that they feel adequate with their work skills but they mostly need the help of parents and other professionals, as well as educational support.

**Keywords:** Emotional competence and emotion socialization • Preschool period • Teacher opinions • Qualitative research

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Emotional competence based on the emotional intelligence model is defined as the interaction of emotion and cognition (Mayer & Salovey, 1997). The integrated model approach which explains emotional intelligence in terms of social behaviors and personality characteristics (Bar-On, 2000; Goleman, 1995) is a significant study area related to early childhood literature (Michalson & Lewis, 1985). Many research studies (Denham et al., 2003; Eisenberg, Cumberland, & Spinrad, 1998) state that emotional competence is a critical component of emotional development in constituting successful relationships in social contexts, and emotional competence takes place in the center of social relationships.

Parke (1994) emphasizes emotional competence remarking that successful interactions of children with others depend on understanding emotional situations and giving appropriate reactions to emotional stimulants. Studies about early childhood point to the concept of emotional competence, the skills and behaviors of children related to emotions like the expression, awareness, labeling, and understanding of emotion from emotional facial expressions and contextual clues (Denham, 1998; Saarni, 1999). In addition, studies emphasize the necessity of using emotional competence to predict positive acquisitions like adaptation to school, developing a positive attitude, academic success, attachment, prosocial behaviors, and friendly relations (Eisenberg & Spinrad, 2004; Garner & Estep, 2001). Socialization attempts by adults, especially from parents, affect the emotional competence of children. These attempts from parents and specific behaviors directed towards the emotions of children are described as emotion socialization behaviors; they include parental beliefs, goals, and values related to a child's emotional experiences, expressions of emotion, and emotion regulations (Eisenberg et al., 1998). Further describing the emotion socialization behaviors of parents can be specialized as parents differentiating the emotions of a child and directing their child to manage their emotions. Emotion socialization mechanisms based on social learning mechanisms (Halberstadt, 1991) are explained within the framework of being a model (how do parents show or not show their own emotions), giving guidance about emotions (awareness of parents about their own emotions as well as their child's, talking to a child about emotions), and how the parents react towards the emotions of children (rewards and punishments) (Denham, 1998; Gottman, Katz, & Hooven, 1996).

Within the context of emotion socialization, parents use methods in daily life like discussing emotions with their child and showing reactions towards the emotions of children. Parents' discussion of emotions with children is an important opportunity for teaching emotions to children (Brown & Dunn, 1992). In this way, children label emotions and can understand the reasons and results of emotions (Denham & Auerbach, 1995), as well as provide themselves and others with an understanding of emotion (Denham, Cook, & Zoller, 1992). Parents can give problem-focused responses (the help given to a child for solving problems in an emotionally difficult situation), emotion-focused responses (giving relaxing and soothing responses when a child is restless) and emotion-encouraging responses (encouraging children to express their emotion) to the emotions their children show. These responses are described as directly supporting emotion socialization methods. When a mother minimizes the degree of a child's emotional reaction is known as "minimization reactions," verbal or physical punishment for when a child expresses their emotions is "punitive reactions," and these socializing methods are indirectly supportive (Fabes, Poulin, Eisenberg, & Madden-Derdich, 2002). Directly supportive emotion-socialization methods which have an adaptive function in the development of child include creating a reliable emotional environment for children, assisting children in understanding emotions, being a model to a child through appropriate emotional reactions, and appreciating a child's own emotion-regulation efforts (Garner, Dunsmore, & Southam-Gerow, 2008). In this way, children become more sensitive and prepared to learn emotions, thus becoming easier for children to differentiate emotions from each other (Denham & Grout, 1993). It is predicated that educators can use the socialization methods of parents and transfer them to teacher behaviors (White & Howe, 1998, as cited in Ahn, 2005). Although family is accepted as the first step and an important institution for socializing children, it is not the only social structure that provides socialization for children (Denham, 2001). In addition, other social contexts like schools and kindergarten give important socializing opportunities, and their role in the emotional development of a child cannot be neglected (Ahn & Stifter, 2010). Teachers as well as parents are accepted as important adults who socialize the emotions of children through several competencies (Denham, 1998). For the early childhood years, a lack of studies on emotion has been stressed in the themes that were studied on teaching and teachers (Nias, 1996). Even though there are school programs that have been developed

on emotional competence in the literature (e.g., Izard et al., 2008), it is asserted that preschool teachers have very little education and limited knowledge (Meyer, 2009) on how to develop children's social and emotional competence (Garner, 2010; Poulou, 2005), how to regulate the emotions of children, and how to socialize the emotions of children (Eisenberg, Cameron, Tyron, & Dodez, 1981). In addition, when one thinks about the amount of time preschool teachers spend with children in school, it can be stated that research on the role of teachers in the emotional development and emotion socialization of children is predominantly needed (Kitzman & Howard, 2011). Accordingly, when recent studies related to this subject as conducted in Turkish literature are reviewed, it can be seen that mostly the emphatic tendency and skills of preschool teachers (e.g., Çelik & Çağdaş, 2010; Durmuşoğlu Saltalı & Erbay, 2013) are discussed. In addition, although limited, there have been studies on preschool teachers' general and special-area competencies in terms of vocational competencies (Yılmaz, Koç, Gönen, & Üstün, 2010). Moreover, there have been studies in which preschool teachers evaluated children's peer relationships (e.g., Ummanel, 2007), behavioral problems, and social competencies (e.g., Karaca, Gündüz, & Aral, 2011), and studies that have examined the effects of the emotion education program on the emotional skills of six-year-old preschool children (Durmuşoğlu Saltalı & Deniz, 2010). It is accepted that such kinds of studies contribute to the literature. On the other hand, there have not been similar studies in which preschool teachers' conceptual or practical opinions on child development of emotional competence and emotion socialization could be found in Turkish literature. For this reason, the present study is thought to be important for presenting preschool teachers' points of view and opinions about emotional competence and emotion socialization.

### Purpose

The purpose of this study is to investigate the opinions of preschool teachers on emotional competence and emotion socialization. Expressed more broadly, it is aimed to deeply investigate the conceptual knowledge of teachers about emotional competence and emotion socialization, their classroom practices, and their views and ideas about vocational roles and competencies. In line with the aim of this research, answers for the following questions within determined themes were explored:

About preschool teachers:

1. What are their opinions on children's emotional competencies during the preschool period?
2. What are their opinions on emotion socialization behaviors?
3. What are their opinions on a classroom environment aimed at children's emotional competence?
4. What are their opinions on the methods they use in socializing children's emotions within the classroom environment?
5. What are their opinions on children's expression of emotions within the classroom environment?
6. What are their opinions on the emotional competencies they have?
7. What are their opinions on the role of teachers and parents in the development of emotional competence and emotion socialization of children?
8. What are their opinions on their vocational competence in the development of the emotional competence and emotion socialization of children?
9. What are their opinions regarding the areas they need professional support with for the development of emotional competence and emotion socialization in children?

## Method

### Research Design

This study is a qualitative study in terms of revealing the perceptions and experiences of individuals participating in a given event (Şimşek & Yıldırım, 2003). The phenomenological method among qualitative research designs was used in the study. The phenomenological method focuses on facts which one is aware of but does not have a deep or detailed understanding of (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006). In this study, teacher opinions and experiences on themes related to their conceptual knowledge of emotional competence and emotion socialization, the classroom environment they create, and their practices and vocational competencies are aimed to be revealed. For this reason the phenomenological method has been used.

### Study Group

Twenty teachers working in state and private preschools in Aksaray's city-center participated in the study. Because the use of large samples for deep

investigation creates difficulties in qualitative studies (Şimşek & Yıldırım, 2003), the data group of the study was limited to 20 participants. In a qualitative study, individuals from the chosen sample can provide more information (Büyüköztürk, Kılıç Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz, & Demirel, 2008), and data sources in phenomenological studies are composed of the individuals or groups which reveal or reflect this phenomenon (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006). In this study, the snowball sampling method (from among the purposeful sampling methods) was used to reach twenty preschool teachers. In phenomenological research studies, the snowball sampling method is one of the methods accepted as appropriate. This approach can be a rich source of information in respect to the researchers' problem or can be especially effective in determining a situation (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006). The twenty teachers in the study group are female teachers between the ages of 25 and 32. Nineteen of the teachers have Bachelor's degrees and are permanent staff while one of them has an Associate's degree and works on contract. Fourteen of the teachers work in a state preschool education institution, while six of them work in private preschools. Teachers' level of experience in their profession varies from one year to 7.5 years. The children in these teachers' classrooms are between four and five years old, and classroom sizes vary between eighteen and twenty-five students.

### Data Collection Tools

Teacher opinions on children's emotional competence and emotion socialization behaviors were collected using the interview method which is the most frequently used method for data collection in a qualitative study. Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview form prepared by the researcher. While creating the semi-structured interview form, literature was reviewed and a conceptual frame was created in order to increase the internal validity of the research. For example, studies indicating that classroom environment and teacher-student interactions have an important effect on emotional competencies such as understanding emotion and regulating emotion in children (De Morat, 1998; Thompson, 1990). In the interactions of teachers working with children in early childhood, strategies like guidance, modeling, and asking questions are key important strategies in personnel competence (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], n.d.). After literature reviews, themes and subcategories were determined. Subcategories for the theme of conceptual knowledge of teachers about

emotional competence and emotion socialization are comprised of the teacher opinions on children's emotional competencies and emotion socialization. Subcategories for the theme of classroom environment and the practices in emotional competence and emotion socialization are comprised of the classroom environment support and development of emotional competence, emotion socialization methods used by teachers within the classroom environment, and teachers' methods for expressing emotions within the classroom environment. Subcategories for the theme of teachers' vocational competence in emotional competence and emotion socialization are comprised of the opinions of teachers' emotional competencies, the role of teachers and parents in developing emotional competence and emotion socialization, teachers' perception of occupational competence, and the need for support of emotional competence and emotion socialization. In order to provide internal validity related to the interview form that was prepared, four professionals were consulted. In accordance with their professional opinions on the relationship of questions to the subject and the clarity and comprehensibility of the questions, the form was finalized. A pilot study was held using two teachers to understand the comprehensibility and clarity of the interview form. The results were evaluated by another professional and the appropriateness of the questions was decided upon. In addition, a professional academician with a doctoral degree, professional on determining teacher competencies in developmental psychology, and another professional with a doctoral degree in developmental psychology, a professional in teacher competencies, were consulted.

### Data Analysis

In analyzing the data of this study, because the themes are to be a base for a conceptual structure and the analysis of the research was previously determined, data revealing the opinions and experiences of teachers on emotional competence and emotion socialization was analyzed using descriptive analysis. Data obtained through the method of descriptive analysis can both be summarized and interpreted depending on pre-determined themes, or it can be presented by taking into account the questions or dimensions used in the interview process (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2006). In this respect, in order to analyze data, voice recordings were computerized. By giving the recordings to a professional in the field of qualitative research, the appropriate transfer of data to a computer was controlled and approval was received. After this stage, data was placed into descriptive data indexes by

the researcher and qualitative research professional. Coding sessions were conducted and the results were grouped under determined themes and then interpreted. Results were presented using descriptive expressions and the findings were explained and interpreted through direct quotations from the expressions of the teachers. Themes and categories were created to provide easier understanding of the findings. Teacher opinions are shown in the tables. During data analysis, codings were made not only by the researcher but also by a professional in qualitative study. In order to determine the consistencies between codings, a degree of agreement as proposed by Miles and Huberman (1994) was calculated [ $\text{Reliability} = \frac{\text{Agreement}}{\text{Agreement} + \text{Disagreement}}$ ]. As a result of the calculation for internal reliability of the research, the level of agreement between coders was found to be 85%. Because an agreement level of 70% or higher is accepted as sufficient, this research was accepted as reliable in terms of data analysis. In order to increase the internal reliability of the research, related parts of the findings are given directly without interpretation.

### Procedure

In the procedure section, the stages performed in the research are given within the frame of strategies applied to increase validity and reliability. Interviews with teachers were conducted in October and November of 2013. In order to increase the external reliability, interviews were made at the most appropriate times and in context with the institutions according to the work schedule of the teachers. Prior to each interview, teachers were given foreknowledge about the subject and the purpose of the study was explained. Data was collected through face-to-face interviews, and permission was obtained for the voice recordings. The purpose of voice records was explained to the teachers prior to the study, and they were informed that they could remove their recordings. All teachers gave their permission for voice recording. Data was presented directly without interpretation for external reliability of the research. As a way of increasing external validity, the research process and what was done during this process is expressed in detail. Within this scope, headings like research model, study group, data collection tool, data collection process, and analysis and interpretation of data are presented in detail.

In order to obtain internal reliability of the study, some strategies were applied. Those strategies may be summarized under the following headings. *a)* As stated in the data collection tools section, while

developing the semi-structured interview form, literature related to the subject matter was reviewed, a conceptual framework was created, and four professionals were consulted. *b)* Data was described in detail in order to provide transferability of findings that were obtained through the research. *c)* In order to help teachers answer questions comfortably and correctly, the questions were asked as casually as possible within the interview. In accordance with the nature of the semi-structured interview form, when teachers were having difficulty during the interview answering questions or understanding the questions, questions like "Can you give some examples?" "Can you exemplify it?" "Can you explain this?" were used. *d)* In direct quotations, the real names of teachers were kept confidential; direct quotations were named T1, T2, and so on. *e)* The research report was examined for confirmation from a professional academician working in the field of qualitative research apart from the researcher doing the study; the consistency of the raw data as well as the findings and interpretations were executed.

### Results

In the direction of the aim of the research, teacher opinions were classified within the framework of their frequent answers about pre-determined themes and presented by giving place to direct transfers.

#### Teachers' Conceptual Knowledge about Emotional Competency and Emotion Socialization

Opinions of teachers participating in the study about the emotional competencies that children should have are presented in Table 1.

	<i>f</i>
Sharing, Cooperation	10 (23%)
Self-knowledge, self-expression, and self esteem	9 (21%)
Communication with teacher and friends	7 (16%)
Being happy, exultation, being sorry, crying	6 (14%)
Understanding the emotions of others	5 (11%)
Managing emotions like anger and aggressiveness	4 (9%)
Identification of family	2 (5%)
Playing together	1 (2%)
Total	44

Teachers expressed their opinions about the emotional competencies preschool children should

have as sharing and cooperation. Some teachers expressed their opinions as follows: “They are addicted to their parents too much. They don’t know how to share at all. Because they don’t know how to share, chaos is experienced in the classroom,” [T8]. “The subject of sharing is very problematic. There are both nice things and troublesome things on this subject. We make sharing days under the name of Toys Day,” [T10]. “Last week a child brought a little chocolate to class. Another child said to me, ‘Shall I make my mother prepare cookies? I shall bring them to class and share,’ the child said. Sharing is very important at this stage for children,” [T2]. After sharing and cooperation, teachers described children in terms of emotional competencies as having self-esteem, self-knowledge, and self-expression. Teacher opinions on this subject are as follows: “I perceive self-expression as an emotional skill during the preschool period,” [T4]. “We want self-esteem to develop in the preschool period in terms of emotional skills. Self-expression and sharing is also important in this period,” [T9].

Teacher opinions related to emotion socialization is given in Table 2.

Table 2  
Distribution of Teacher Opinions Related to Describing Emotion Socialization Behavior

	<i>f</i>
Feeling comfortable and helping self-expression	6 (38%)
Helping empathize with friends	5 (31%)
Helping make a child accept that there are others	2 (13%)
Keeping calm after reactions children give	1 (6%)
Helping children perceive and accept the environment	1 (6%)
Taking into consideration individual differences	1 (6%)
Total	16

Although teachers state that they cannot completely define the terms of emotion socialization behaviors, they define their opinions in terms of emotion socialization behaviors as helping children feel comfortable with self-expression and helping children empathize with their peers. Teachers state their opinions on this subject as follows: “I provide children with the opportunity to self-express, to talk more. If the child comes in difficult in the morning, I let them talk; if the child feels bad, they can express themselves, become comfortable, and leave school happy. This is important to me,” [T5]. “In order for the emotions of children to be socialized, they should be together with their peers in school. They should be educated together and receive help empathizing with their peers,” [T10]. “I might be unable to make a complete definition or I can say something, I don’t

know how to say, I use the empathy method often when children experience a problem. I make the child think firstly. If two children experience something I call on them and ask them, ‘You do that, but how would your friend feel?’ Empathy is helpful in solving reciprocal problems,” [T1].

### Classroom Environment and Practices in Emotional Competence and Emotion Socialization

Teacher opinions on classroom environments supporting and developing emotional competence are given in Table 3.

Table 3  
Distribution of Teacher Opinions on Supporting and Developing the Classroom Environment in terms of Emotional Competence

	<i>f</i>
Warm, comfortable with self-expression, reliable environment	9 (50%)
Positive and stimulating	3 (16.6%)
Positive and regular	3 (16.6%)
Encouraging and comforting with play	1 (6%)
Free environment far from danger and similar to a home environment	1 (6%)
Sharing and regular	1 (6%)
Total	18

When Table 3 is examined, teachers can be seen to express opinions about creating classroom environments that are warm, comfortable in terms of self-expression, and reliable within the scope of supporting and developing emotional competence. Some of these opinions are as follows: “Teachers should provide appropriate environments for children to express their emotions. For example, a child may be unable to express their emotion in a block-center activity. In this situation, we can make physical contact with the child; we can caress their head. In addition, we can make role divisions where children play ‘family’ or we can include other children in this play,” [T18]. “They should know my reactions well. I don’t hide my feelings. I give them self-esteem. They should trust me so that they can express themselves within the classroom. In this way their anxiety can decrease and they can express their feelings,” [T1]. “Children in my classroom should feel comfortable; they should express themselves. In this way, their self-esteem can develop. I narrate their pictures starting from their first day. To encourage their emotions, I sneezed in class. My student told me “Bless you.” I liked this too much. This meant I had helped the child be self-expressive and talk about themselves; I had created a comfortable classroom environment,” [T20].



Table 4  
Distribution of Teacher Opinions about Emotion Socialization Methods They Use in the Classroom

	<i>f</i>
Supporting, encouraging and talking to	8 (20%)
Play, tales, story	8 (20%)
Drama	7 (18%)
Showing empathy	5 (13%)
Providing reliance	5 (13%)
Behavior table	4 (10%)
Music	3 (8%)
Total	40

As can be understood from Table 4, teachers expressed opinions on the emotion socialization methods they had used most in the classroom environment as supporting a child, encouraging a child, talking to a child, and accompanying a child. Some teachers expressed their opinions on this subject as follows: "I told a child to express a behavior they do. I encourage and ask their peers, also. 'Was your friend's behavior correct?' I evaluate the behavior of a child at that moment whether it is positive or negative," [T2]. "I start asking how every child feels in the morning. I ask children about the things that made sad them today. They are encouraged to talk. I start with myself. I say I talked with my mom this morning, so I am sad. Then I ask children what events made them sad or happy this morning. Recently a child said their parents had argued that morning. The child said they had argued too much and this makes them sad," [T14]. Teachers expressed that they use play, tales, story, music, and drama activities as methods for socializing emotions. Some teacher opinions on this subject are as follows: "Stories, dramatizations, and language activities are very effective. Especially in situations of being thankful or of sharing in story books, it is very effective," [T2]. "Drama is useful. Instead of talking one by one, I produce plays out of things that make children sad or happy. For example, I say to a child, 'You are an unwanted child in this play. What do you feel?' Drama is very useful in terms of feelings of play for a child," [T14].

Table 5  
Distribution of Opinions of Teachers according to Ways to Express Emotions in Classroom

	<i>f</i>
Giving verbal feedback about what the child did	9 (50%)
Expressing emotions using "I" language	7 (32%)
Lowering one's self to the child's level, saying positive things	4 (19%)
Expressing emotions, especially with gestures and mimics	1 (4%)
Expressing emotions through touch and contact	1 (4%)
Total	22

As stated in Table 5, most of the teachers said that they expressed their emotions verbally to students in the classroom environment and give verbal feedback to the children. Teachers also express that they use "I" language, and transfer positive and negative emotions to children using "I" language. Some teachers expressed their opinions on this subject as follows: "I state my emotions verbally. I talk with a child even if I am unhappy. Even if I say something simple to child, I talk to the child verbally or I talk to the child about the things they did. I try to put myself in their place. I use 'I' language. I tell an unruly child 'You did this and this made me very unhappy,'" [T15]. "I tell children if they made me tired or happy. No matter if it is positive or negative, I say it. Recently I said 'You made me tired, I am tired.' One of children told me I should not come if I am tired," [T2]. "The words I use are very important. I tell them they are great, they are super about what they do or say. Sometimes I hug them or caress their cheek. It has a positive effect," [T10]. "I tell them my positive feelings, I express my positive feelings. Sometimes I open my arms. But I don't express my negative feelings. I don't tell them when I am angry. I spare them. I can't do. I behave as if I am angry. They laugh at me," [T8].

### Teachers' Vocational Competence in Emotional Competence and Emotion Socialization

Table 6  
Distribution of Opinions Teachers Have About Their Emotional Competencies

	<i>f</i>
They think they are a good model for children	18 (75%)
They think they are an empathetic teacher with children	5 (21%)
They think they show good communication skills with children	1 (4%)
Total	24

Distributions of opinions of teachers about emotional competencies they have are given in Table 6. Most teachers stated opinions about being a good model and empathetic teacher in terms of children's emotional competencies and emotion socialization. About being a model, they say: "If my arm hits a child's head by mistake, I apologize, I become a model. I think this would be a model," [T10]. "I like painting. I have a degree in fine arts. I think I am a social person. I express my emotions, my excitement, easily. I understand easily the psychology and emotional state of children. Sometimes I observe that if I state my emotion, my excitement, the children do the same. So I think being a model is important. I think I am a good model; I observe that what I do, children do the same," [T12]. About

being an empathetic teacher, [T10] says, *"I know and understand children well. This field is impossible to manage without loving children, so I understand them and I think I am an empathetic teacher."* [T12] says, *"I both set empathy with children and behave empathetically towards children. I approach children in anger, in love, in sharing, in all subjects empathetically."*

Table 7

*Distribution of Roles of Teachers and Parents Related to Development of Emotional Competence and Emotion Socialization*

	<i>f</i>
Role of teacher is more important in terms of being a model	18 (34%)
Role of parents is important, but teachers and parents must cooperate	13 (24%)
Role of teacher is more important due to observing child development and guiding the child	6 (11%)
Role of teacher is more important in terms of encouraging children	5 (9%)
Role of teacher is more important in terms of guiding parents	4 (7%)
Role of teacher is more important in terms of talking to children and showing them about their behaviors	4 (7%)
Parents are more important in terms of being a model for the child	3 (6%)
Total	53

As seen in Table 7, although teachers stated that as far as being a role model, teachers are more important than parents in developing the emotional competencies of children, they expressed the importance of parental cooperation with the teacher. Within this scope, [T14] expressed her opinions as follows: *"Developing children emotionally and supporting children positively is our mission. We should be a model; this is our important role. The interaction of parents and teachers is important. Teachers can be insufficient if alone. We invite parents to school and interview with them stage-by-stage, especially if there is something we can't manage. But sometimes parents say we cannot know their children better than them. So parent-teacher cooperation and interaction is quite important."* [T11] said, *"Communication with family is very important. If communication between parents and school is strong, the child is self-confident and able to express themselves emotionally. If parents do not have contact with teachers, we are unable to do anything."* Together with the role of being models, teachers also observe, evaluate, and guide, too. On this subject, [T14] expressed her opinions as follows: *"I make observations in the first weeks. If the child is under pressure, they cannot express themselves. It reveals that they are under pressure. The observations of a teacher are important. The happiness of a child affects other developmental areas: their self-care,*

*psycho-motor skills..."* [T11] states, *"Teachers shouldn't be suppressive. Teachers must make good observations in their free time activities so that they can see whether a child expresses emotions or not. These observations must be reinforced with in-class activities."*

Table 8

*Distribution of Opinions about Vocational Competence Perceptions of Teachers on Emotional Competence and Emotion Socialization*

	<i>f</i>
Finds herself sufficient but thinks it is important to develop herself all the time	9 (47%)
Finds herself sufficient	7 (36%)
Finds herself insufficient	3 (16%)
Total	19

The distribution of opinions of teachers related to vocational competence is given in Table 8. Most teachers stated that they feel adequate professionally in developing the emotional competence and emotion socialization of children. However, they should develop themselves. [T14] expressed her opinions as follows: *"I rely on myself on this subject and I feel sufficient as a teacher. However, the things I should teach are not just teaching numbers or making them draw lines. I do this fondly and don't see this as only my job. I love children and families trust on me. I want children to come to school happily. Loving children makes me feel happy."* [T17] expressed, *"I feel competent. But in some situations I need to develop myself and learn. When I have difficulty, I consult my colleagues or books. Sometimes I realize my mistakes. But usually I feel competent in my job."* [T1] said, *"Of course I feel competent. Parents give feedback in this direction. However, I try to develop myself. For example, I use too much drama in teaching; I do this too much. I try to develop myself this way. I develop myself by learning a lot from my colleagues."*

Table 9

*Distribution of teacher opinions about the need for support in their vocational development on emotional competence and emotion socialization*

	<i>f</i>
Need support from family	7 (44%)
Need support from psychologists, psychological counselors, and school counselors for unsolved situations	6 (38%)
Need material and education (educational videos, books)	3 (19%)
Total	16

Teachers also expressed that they find themselves supporting the emotional competence of children within the scope of emotion socialization; however,



they need the support of family. [T20] said *"Family's readiness is very important. In the beginning of every year, children come one week earlier according to schedule for back-to-school week. I ask each family what they expect and what they need. Parent profiles and their potentials are very different compared to those of last year. Just like children, parents show differences too. I ask parents to tell me a memory of their child. Family support is important and very much needed by me for communicating with a child. Support of family is very necessary."* [T12] states, *"I realize families are very comfortable recently. There are no rules at home. However, a child obeys rules at school and becomes like a lamb. Parents come to school and ask why their child is not behaving at home the same as at school. They may even be suspicious about what is happening in school. There are even parents who bring their child to a strict teacher because then the child is quiet. They don't cry at school but they are naughty at home and cry all the time. We know children well because sometimes children use their family. In these situations, we actually become surprised too. We seek the support of family, and family should support us."* Teachers stated that the personal growth of emotional competence and emotion socialization should be supported with educational programs and literature. On this subject [T6] said, *"I think we as preschool teachers get a minimal education while working in the field. I think the support that is given to us by educational programs should be increased."* Most teachers stated that they need the support of a psychologist, psychological counselor, or guidance teacher who works with children when they face situations they have difficulty coping with. [T15] expressed her opinions as follows: *"We may experience difficult-to-solve situations or erroneous tendencies. I personally very much need support from a psychologist. I think we might harm children in unresolved situations. So, we have many subjects we need to consult someone on. I want to ask a psychologist what kind of an approach we should use, because we may be mostly insufficient."*

### Discussion

In the theme of this research study related to children's emotional competence, although teachers self-described their skill of understanding emotions (a dimension of emotional competence), opinions explaining the emotional competence of children in terms of sharing and cooperation came out. When literature about emotional competence is reviewed, it is expressed that emotional competence is comprised of multi-dimensional skills like understanding emotion, expressing emotion, and regulating emotion in order to manage emotional relationships in different

social contexts (Denham, 1998; Saarni, 1999). Social competence is the group of behaviors reflecting social interaction such as getting along well with others, starting and participating in play, and conflict resolution. Helping others voluntarily is accepted as a prosocial behavior and is evaluated as a dimension of social competence (Schneider, 1993). In this study, the reasons why teachers explained children's emotional competence in terms of sharing and cooperation (dimensions of social competence) is that emotional development and social development are closely related developmental areas in children's preschool thought socialization (Stevenson, Azuma, & Hakuta, 1986, as cited in Hayashi, 2011). On the other hand, it was stressed that developmental areas are interrelated. It was emphasized, however, that educators must be aware of these developmental areas and should support these developmental areas to the utmost for children to experience learning (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2005). From this point of view, in the direction of the findings obtained from this research, it can be seen that the conceptual repertoire of teachers during preschool should be enriched with emotional competence as the base of social competence, determining children's interactions with others and the shape of social relationships (Denham & Burton, 2003). In the research, some teachers explained the emotional competencies that preschool children have such as self-esteem, self-knowledge, and self-expression. This finding signals the need to increase preschool teachers' knowledge on emotional competence. It is understood from this study that teachers neither expressed a complete concept nor made a complete definition for emotion socialization behaviors. In order for teachers to understand socializing emotions in preschool better, they need to increase their knowledge about emotional competence and they need positive developments related to their competency in teaching (Emde, 2009; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). In addition, the European Qualification Framework (European Commission, 2008) stresses "cognitive competence" (the use of concrete information, theories, and concepts gained through experience) within the framework of general vocational competencies and in "developmental areas" within preschool teachers' special area competencies. This was put into action by the Ministry of National Education's (Millî Eğitim Bakanlığı [MoNE]) General Directorate of Teacher Education (2008) regarding skills related to the social emotional development of children aged three through six.

Regarding the theme of research focusing on the classroom environment and practices in emotional competence and emotion socialization, when the

subcategory of classroom environment support and development of emotional competence is examined, teachers mostly stated opinions as being a warm and secure classroom environment in which children are comfortable in self-expression. These teacher opinions correspond to the literature. Many children spend more time with their teachers compared to parents, particularly during the week while in a preschool educational institution (Denham, Bassett, & Zinsser, 2012). For this reason, teachers have to focus on being warm and sensitive towards children just as their parents within the classroom environment with the intent of developing emotional competence in them (Boyd, Barnett, Bodrova, Leong, & Gomby, 2005). Studies in the literature on emotional competence and emotion socialization highlight the importance of a classroom environment which is supportive and sets positive relationships with a child in order to develop and support their emotional competence. In addition, it is underlined that a positive atmosphere and emotional interaction within the classroom affects the empathetic behaviors and academic success of children positively (Evans, Harvey, Buckley, & Yan, 2009). In the subcategory of emotion socialization methods used in the classroom environment, when teacher opinions were investigated, it was understood that teachers mostly use socialization methods of support, encouragement, and talking with children. Although teacher opinions reveal that their conceptual knowledge about emotion socialization is limited, it can be said that they use emotion socialization methods within the classroom environment and they can guide children on their emotions. Teacher knowledge and application of emotion socialization methods showed an increase in the quality of the child/teacher relationship and the positive emotions between the teacher and children, allowing for opportunities of learning within the classroom (Evans et al., 2009; Hargreaves, 1998). However, teachers stated that they use activities like plays, tales, stories, music, and drama as emotion socialization methods. Adults can increase children's emotional competence and provide development in an emotional atmosphere with appropriate activities and symbols. For instance, music, drama, and plays not only set emotional channels for children but also provide emotions for use to be transferred culturally (Ulloa, 2011). At the same time, activities like dramas, play, telling tales, reading stories, and music support the development of emotional competence in children. However, teachers' lack of awareness and knowledge about the methods of emotion socialization is related to their inability to see such activities as emotion socialization methods. When the sub-category of teachers' expression of their

own emotions within the classroom is evaluated, it was expressed that teachers gave verbal feedback to children about their own emotions. The importance of teachers verbally expressing their emotions to children is acceptable in terms of the mechanisms for guiding emotions. According to the hypothesis of guiding emotions (one of the emotion socialization processes), parents use verbal communication and talk about the meanings of emotions with their children to provide them with a means to explore and understand emotions (Saarni, 1999). In this study, teacher opinions on expressing positive and negative emotions mostly through "I" language additionally reveals some important points about the use of "I" language. The important point that teachers must pay attention to about "I" language is that they should avoid expressing their anger towards children this way. Adults may sometimes have difficulty using "I" language. Even so, they can start with small exercises and see how much they progress in communication in order to set a healthy communication style with their children (Kılıç, 2012).

When the theme of vocational competence as related to the emotional competence and emotion socialization of preschool teachers is examined, teachers mostly explained their opinions related to emotional competencies in terms of the sub-categories of being empathetic and modeling. These teacher opinions are consistent with the literature in terms of being empathetic. For many children, setting up a positive relationship with an adult is difficult. A negative experience and an undesired beginning in communication can make having a positive teacher-child relationship harder. For this reason, empathetic reactions of teachers are important when communicating with children. Otherwise, it becomes harder for the teacher to take a real place within the social and emotional environment of the child (Gail & Strain, 2004). In this study, teachers described being a model for a child in terms of the emotional skills they have. In the literature, the importance of teachers' views on emotional development as an interpersonal process, their ability to give appropriate emotional reactions to children, and being a model so that children can learn emotions has been stressed (Hyson & Lee, 1996). Although teachers in this study evaluated being a model in terms of the emotional skills they have, it has been expressed in the literature that being a model to children, teaching emotions, and reacting to emotions should be seen as preschool teachers' role in their responsibility for emotion socialization (Ahn, 2005). On the other hand, it is emphasized that skills like teachers' self-awareness of emotions, understanding others' emotions from verbal and

facial expressions, and understanding the reasons and results of emotions are quite important in socializing the emotional competencies of children (Penrose, Perry, & Ball, 2007). In examining the subcategory of the role of teachers and parents in the development of emotional competence and emotion socialization, teachers usually stated that being a model is important. Fredrickson (1998) said that when parents consciously model emotions for their child, it contributes to the child's understanding of emotions, in turn supporting the learning and problem-solving processes. The same can be said as correct for teachers. Although teachers have an important role in helping to recognize and regulate the emotions of children, they are accepted as quite important role models in terms of how children express emotions (Panfile & Liable, 2012). In that study, the importance of cooperation between teachers and parents also came out. This view is also supported by the literature. Communication between parents and teachers is very important in terms of realizing and supporting the needs of children and families. If a strong and trustful relationship with a family cannot be obtained, the transfer of information between a family and teacher about the child cannot proceed correctly. So every kind of developmental information about a child must be shared (Kılıç, 2012). Also, teachers stated their opinions that guiding children and observing them is the role of the teacher. Literature supports this finding. It is stated that during preschool, adults have an important role in shaping the emotional competencies and guiding children with their emotional development similar to Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory (Denham, 1998). Adults teach emotions to children by guiding them with emotions; they pay attention to the emotional clues of children, helping them understand and regulate their own emotions within social interactions (Denham, Bassett, & Wyatt, 2007). Teachers state that they play the role of observer in emotional competence and emotion socialization. One of the best ways parents and teachers can collect information about children is to observe them in their natural environment (e.g., the classroom environment). During preschool period, teachers can understand the development, interests, and needs of children by observing and recording them in the classroom environment (Bordignon & Lam, 2004). While a teacher is observing, factors like classroom environment, methods used in the classroom, and the program all contribute to the observation process and help with understanding the developmental needs of children better. On the other hand, within the classroom, observing the emotional development and dimensions related to emotional development may not be as easy as observing cognitive and motor-

skills development (Bietz, 2012). Preschool teachers must know which child is sad, which child is happy, and how to react to children's emotions. In this way, they may get information about how children cope with peer communication, learning new styles in the academic fields. In this study, teachers stated they felt competent occupationally regarding the theme of occupational competence related to emotional competence and emotion socialization. In the findings of Yılmaz et al. (2010), preschool teachers perceived themselves to be sufficient in the fields of special area competencies. This is similar to the findings of this study. It is emphasized that preschool teachers are expected to have specific knowledge and competencies and when teachers have a high level of vocational competence, it can create a difference not only in the developmental outputs of children but also in creating a high-level, disciplined environment (Elliott, 2006). In this study, although teachers felt vocationally sufficient in emotional competence and emotion socialization, they said they needed family support, education, materials, and the support of other professionals. Zinserr, Shewark, Denham, and Curby (2014) underline the importance of family support for preschool teachers in the emotional development of children. Maxwell and Eller (1994) stated that families should visit schools during preschool and pay close attention to the details which can affect child in school; cooperation and support between families and teachers would internalize a common educational philosophy, making the adaptation of children easier. In a study, together with family support and parallel with teacher opinions on educational needs, the OECD report (2006) stated that educational systems must invest in teacher education, and this education will reveal a high-quality teacher. This situation also applies to teachers working in preschools. In a meta-analysis study made between 1980 and 2005, Fukkink and Lont (2007) found a significant relationship between the in-service educational programs that were given to teachers of children aged three and under to the perceived level of educational competence. In addition, it is stressed that it would be beneficial for families and teachers in preschools to work with other professionals and cooperate with them (Bruder, 2010; Flottman, Mc Kernan, & Collette, 2011).

In the direction of the findings obtained within the scope of this study and related with this subject, some basic advice may be presented to practitioners and researchers working in the field. According to Vygotsky (1978, as cited in Gauvain & Cole, 1997) who is a representative of the socio-cultural theory, child development and education is a whole that cannot be viewed separately. In the framework of the

concept of zone of proximal development, teachers who understand child development can realize the skills of a child when they are still in their bud-stage, tracing the skills of the child from early childhood to the most recent level of their developmental stage, guiding the child. Piaget (1964 as cited in Gauvain & Cole, 1997) expressed that teachers need to understand the development of children and their developmental specialties. In this framework, the findings of the study show the need to increase the knowledge level and awareness of children related to what their emotional competencies are. In the publication on preschool teacher competencies as determined by MoNE (2008) (developmental fields, family contribution, cooperation with school and society, and so on), studies about developmental fields were prioritized. Together with this, the "Preschool Education Program" and "Education Program for 0 through 36 Month-Old Children" from MoNE gives place to gaining emotional development as well as to activities related to emotional development. Education material in programs related to this started to be applied during the 2013-2014 school year. In order to internalize the practices of teachers working in the field, as part of the contents of preschool education and child development undergraduate and graduate education, a need to add conceptual information about children's emotional competencies should be given more broadly and come out more expressively. An increase in teacher knowledge and awareness on this subject would help them be aware of possible delays or deficiencies in the emotional competencies of children, and it would be a protective and preventative factor in minimizing negative effects in other developmental fields (Campbell, Pierce, March, Ewing, & Szumowski, 1994). Similarly, as far as the emotion socialization methods that teachers are aware of but do not have a deep or detailed understanding of, courses in undergraduate classes, graduate classes, and in-service educations should be held.

In this study, it is seen that teachers create a classroom environment which is warm and suitable for self-expression in order to develop emotional competence in children. Additionally, teachers mostly show their emotions verbally and have emotional competencies such as being empathetic or a model in the classroom environment. It is stated in the literature that the emotional competence teachers have (e.g., expressing their own emotions) is affected by the emotional atmosphere of the school and classrooms, managers, parents, and other adults that they interact with (Zembylas, 2007). In addition, factors like work stress, proportion of children in class, school management, and managers are considered to be

effective in developing or preventing the emotional competencies that teachers have. It has been stated that understanding these factors would be effective in educating and supervising teachers who will socialize the emotions of children (Denham et al., 2012). Therefore, the quality of preschool educational institutions should be regulated and controlled according to the quality standards of the American Academy of Pediatrics (2005) so that they support emotional competence and emotion socialization in children. Among the indicators of this are personnel-to-children proportions, group size, quality of managers, quality of teachers, education of managers and personnel, and controls. The literature also states that in order to increase the vocational competence of teachers, it is important to create a high-quality, disciplined environment (Elliott, 2006). In this way, the developmental and learning outputs of children will be affected positively (Litjens & Taguma, 2010). In this framework, it can be advised that studies increasing the interaction of preschool teachers with families and other professionals, as well as sharing more model practices, are important. It is understood from the opinions of teachers that their perceptions of vocational competence are sufficiently independent from the status of the institution in which they work (state or private) and their years of experience. Although it has been said in the literature that there is a high relationship between the educational level of teachers and the quality of discipline, this relationship is not completely clear or understandable, and there is a need for more research that seeks to understand what teachers learn and what they apply within the framework of evidence-based data (Diamond & Powell, 2011). In this direction, new studies focusing on the vocational competence of preschool teachers may be advised. In addition, it is stated in the literature that the reactions of preschool teachers from the emotional competencies of children such as understanding emotion, regulating emotion, as well as the effects and contributions on emotional and social competence must be investigated more deeply (Denham, 2001).

One of the limitations this study has is the fact that it was conducted on teachers working only in the city center of Aksaray. On the other hand, as is the nature of qualitative studies, although the generalizability of the result of this study is limited, the findings could illuminate future studies on the subject in the fields of preschool, child development, and developmental psychology. Moreover, future studies may include not only preschool teachers but also other teachers working in different levels of education with a focus on emotional competence and emotion socialization.

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